“He Is Just the Nowhere Man of British Politics”

Waddle, Maurice; Bull, Peter; Boehnke, Jan

Published in:
Journal of Language and Social Psychology

DOI:
10.1177/0261927X18767472

Publication date:
2019

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

“He is just the Nowhere Man of British Politics”:

Personal Attacks in Prime Minister’s Questions

Maurice Waddle[1], Peter Bull[2], and Jan R. Böhnke[3]

This is the author accepted manuscript of:
Waddle, M., Bull, P., & Böhnke, J. R. (in press). “He Is Just the Nowhere Man of British Politics”: Personal Attacks in Prime Minister’s Questions. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X18767472

Acknowledgements
The authors would like to thank Aimee Barlow for her research assistance. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the editor, Professor Howie Giles, for his guidance and encouragement, and to the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this article. The first author gratefully acknowledges financial support in the form of a teaching studentship from the Department of Psychology, University of York, UK.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The first author was supported by a PhD teaching studentship from the Department of Psychology, University of York, UK.

[1] University of York, York, UK
[2] University of York, York, UK and University of Salford, Manchester, UK
[3] University of Dundee, Dundee, UK

Corresponding Author:
Maurice Waddle, Department of Psychology, University of York, York, YO10 5DD, UK.
Email: mtw508@york.ac.uk

Abstract

Views from the media, the public, and from inside Parliament have expressed discontent with, reportedly, recent high levels of personally antagonistic behaviour in PMQs. The focus of this study is a fine-grained analysis of language classified as a personal attack. A personal attack coding system was devised, and significant individual differences between Prime Ministers and increases across individual premierships were observed. Of the five Prime Ministers between 1979 and 2016, David Cameron was the most personally aggressive, though a significant decrease followed Jeremy Corbyn's appointment as Leader of the Opposition. Potential explanations for recent highs include heightened TV and social media attention coupled with sports-like reporting and party expectation, and not discounting individual personalities. Suggestions for the functions of personal attacks include highlighting differences, disarming or deconstructing adversaries, and equivocation. Further explanations are offered for the relative politeness of Cameron vs Corbyn.

Keywords

PMQs, personalisation, personalization, personal attacks, disrespect, impoliteness, rudeness, insults, incivility.

Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) is a weekly event in the UK House of Commons where the Prime Minister (PM) faces questions from other Members of Parliament (MPs). It has been described as "the shop window of the House of Commons" (Bercow, 2010) but, based on a recent survey, the majority of public opinion indicates discontent with the high levels of political point-scoring (Allen et al., 2014). In 2005, in his first speech as Conservative party leader, David Cameron expressed his dissatisfaction with what he called "Punch and Judy[i] politics" – an obvious reference to PMQs – and pledged changes from the "name-calling, backbiting, point-scoring, finger-pointing" behaviour (Cameron, 2005). In the interim, much has been written about how Cameron's proposed changes failed to materialise. Arguably, the character-bashing, synonymous with the actions of the aggressive puppets, has intensified. Indeed, after becoming PM in 2010, Cameron himself attracted much of the press coverage for name-calling and rudeness. Despite his earlier criticism, it was claimed he went on to "[embrace] the yah-boo style", and that PMQs often "descends into furious mud-slinging", especially when Cameron clashed with Leader of the Opposition (LO) Ed Miliband (Chorley, 2013).

The overall adversarial nature of the weekly debates is increasing in its resemblance to "an unpleasant football match", according to an article in *The Guardian* newspaper, with "secret grudge matches, settlement of scores, and covert fouls committed when the players hope the ref is not looking" (Hoggart, 2011). Furthermore, the Speaker (the parliamentary official charged with keeping order during debates in the House of Commons - currently John Bercow) claims the public have a strong aversion to the rowdiness on display (Hardman, 2015). Indeed, Bercow's disquiet for the potential damage to Parliament's reputation is apparent by his persistent criticism of PMQs (Reid, 2014).

So, is this press and public dissatisfaction indicative of any real change in parliamentary behaviour? Confrontation and hostility was a reported feature of LO/PM clashes in PMQs when Harold Wilson (Labour PM 1964-1970 & 1974-1976) and Edward Heath (Conservative PM 1970-1974) were leaders of their respective parties around half a century ago (Jones, 1973). Are the latest political leaders more antagonistic and rude than recent predecessors? Concern over an apparent increase in incivility in recent years has been reported for American politics (Wolf, Strachan, & Shea, 2012). Sobieraj and Berry (2011) analysed political commentary on American TV, radio, blogs, and in newspaper columns. Similarly, they suggest highly dramatic incivility – termed "outrage" – has increased. Debate over the various aspects of political incivility has been widespread (e.g., Muddiman, 2017). Also in the USA, Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin (2010), who investigated negative campaigning on political websites, suggest there has been an online increase in personal antagonism towards political opponents. Personally antagonistic language directed at opposing politicians is certainly one aspect of incivility – and the focus of the current research into PMQs. It is clear that the development of a reliable measure to facilitate quantitative analyses would help to answer these questions.

Previous research and theory

Of course, the behaviour of politicians in parliamentary debates, including PMQs, has not escaped the attention of researchers. One study focussing on the then PM John Major (Burnham, Jones, & Elgie, 1995) claimed he became less forthcoming in his responses and more impolite than earlier in his premiership. Impoliteness was also the focus of research by Harris (2001), who assessed PMQs from the concept of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987). According to their highly influential theory, the purpose of politeness is to avoid threatening another's face –

face being a person's "positive social value" (Goffman, 1955/[1967, p. 5]) – which can be maintained, enhanced, damaged, or lost during social interaction. Harris (2001) indicated that impoliteness is a systematic feature of PMQs, supporting the suggestion of Culpeper (1996) of the importance of impoliteness in certain contexts, rather than it being little more than a marginal feature. Harris proposed that impoliteness in PMQs is not only an accepted mode of interaction but also one which is approved and even rewarded.

Bull and Wells (2012) performed a systematic analysis of the language used in 18 PMQs sessions from 2007. They identified six different ways that the LO can threaten the face of the PM in their question, and five counter measures that the PM uses to defend face in his/her responses. They supported Harris's (2001) notion of the expectation of face-threatening behaviour in PMQs, claiming MPs enhance their reputations via aggressive communication. Murphy (2014), from a sample of six PMQs sessions, identified seven different face-threatening acts in questions to the PM, and five in the PMs' responses. Furthermore, he highlighted five "impolite linguistic strategies" (p. 91) - defined as face threats deemed highly impolite and confrontational. A more extensive study by Bates, Kerr, Byrne and Stanley (2014) examined PMQs across a 31-year period. Comparing the opening sessions of the five most recent PMs at that time, they reported findings supporting their claim that PMQs was becoming more rowdy, including increases in the number of interruptions. Findings also indicated an escalation in the average number of interventions by the Speaker to call the House to order. They also reported a greater likelihood for MPs to ask *unanswerable* questions[ii] the longer their tenure, plus increasing domination of the proceedings by party leaders.

Though the process of questioning leading government figures is an opportunity for any MP to shine (Giddings & Irwin, 2005), PMQs has come to be dominated by two main players: the LO and the PM (Bates et al., 2014) – their weekly clashes resembling a gladiatorial contest (Bull & Fetzer, 2010). PMQs has been described as a performance by a select group of famous actors "displaying a standard repertoire of rhetorical skills" played out in front of a packed gallery (Lovenduski, 2012, p. 320) – and, since 1989, to the TV-viewing public.

Despite the undoubted valuable contributions of the aforementioned studies to the understanding of communication and behavioural styles of parliamentarians, both as a group and as individuals, they are no barometer of rudeness and personal disrespect. Waddle and Bull (2016), in describing personalisation as having a specific purpose in the context of political discourse, proposed a typology of personalisation to evaluate the discursive practices of politicians. They identified seven distinct types of personalisation, often used as a control measure in the face of a challenging question. However, the basis of their model and its intended application was the political interview. Whilst there are obvious similarities – in both interviews and PMQs, politicians are subjected to a potentially troublesome questioning process – there are obvious differences. In a political interview, there is an expectation on the interviewer, typically a broadcast journalist, to be seen to remain impartial; there is no such obligation on the person asking questions in PMQs (Bull & Fetzer, 2010). Interviews tend to be conducted on a one-to-one basis, without interruption; PMQs is played out in the presence of several hundred MPs, often to a cacophony of interruptive shouts, barracking or laughter. Interviews, typically subject to broadcasters' regulations, and with an agenda set by the interviewer (Greatbatch, 1986), tend to at least resemble a free-flowing conversation; in PMQs, the speaking

turns of individual participants are prompted by the Speaker, and they are expected to conform to parliamentary regulations. Despite these differences, personalisation tactics may be similarly employed in the parliamentary setting, both to protect one's face and to attack the face of opposition members.

A brief history of PMQs

Questioning of the Prime Minister in Parliament first became a regular and frequent event in 1961 (House of Commons Information Office, 2010b). Until 1997, PMQs took place twice weekly – on Tuesdays and Thursdays when Parliament was sitting – typically lasting 15 minutes. It became a single weekly event for around 30 minutes each sitting Wednesday from the outset of Tony Blair's premiership in 1997. Each session begins with the same tabled routine question from an MP chosen via a random selection process known as the *shuffle* (Coe & Kelly, 2009). The purpose of the first question is to ask the PM to list their official engagements, which in turn receives a stock answer. Following this parliamentary ritual, the MP can then ask a *supplementary* question on a topic of their choice. The PM need not have any prior knowledge of a supplementary question, thereby allowing the potential for unpredictability and surprise. The PM then faces further supplementary questions from both opposition and government MPs. Generally, members can ask only one question, giving them no opportunity to follow up on the PM's reply. The LO, however, is permitted six questions, therefore has adequate opportunity for follow-ups to the PM's reply should they wish. Control of the proceedings is the responsibility of the Speaker, who, among other things, has a duty to admonish members who use language deemed unacceptable.

Research focus

The focus of the current research was an evaluation of the level of personalisation – categorised as personal attacks – by the two main players in PMQs: the PM and the LO. To conduct such an analysis, it was necessary to clarify personal attacks appropriate to this specific mode of political communication. Our coding system, described in detail in the subsequent section, is based primarily on language characterised as disrespectful. The period of analysis partially follows that of Bates et al. (2014), namely, the premierships of Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron. Besides providing a means of identifying personalisation, our analysis extends beyond the scope of their research insofar as we analyse both the early and latter periods of each of the five PMs. This feature specifically enables an evaluation of our research aims: to assess levels of this form of personalisation over a period spanning five decades, and within the tenure of each PM.

More specifically, this research tests two hypotheses. Firstly, as the findings of Bates et al. (2014) indicated an increase in rowdiness, we reasoned that could be partly due to increased personal disrespect by the main players. Consequently, we predicted that our analysis would reveal higher levels of such antagonistic language by the more recent leaders. Secondly, Bates et al. also indicated an increased likelihood for MPs to become more troublesome in their questioning the longer their tenure, and Burnham et al (1995) suggested that John Major's impoliteness grew throughout his time in office. Therefore, we also predicted findings indicating personal attack levels by the PMs increased across their premierships.

Method

Participants

The PMs included in this research were Margaret Thatcher (Conservative PM 1979-1990), John Major (Conservative PM 1990-1997), Tony Blair (Labour PM 1997-2007), Gordon Brown (Labour PM 2007-2010) and David Cameron (Conservative PM 2010-2016). The LOs were James Callaghan (Labour LO 1979-1980), Neil Kinnock (Labour LO 1983-1992), Tony Blair (Labour LO 1994-1997), John Major (Conservative LO 1997), William Hague (Conservative LO 1997-2001), David Cameron (Conservative LO 2005-2010), Ed Miliband (Labour LO 2010-2015) and Jeremy Corbyn (Labour LO 2015-present).

Apparatus

The following websites were used to access transcripts and/or video recordings of PMQs: https://www.parliament.uk/ (for transcripts and videos), http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/ (for transcripts), and http://www.c-span.org/ (for videos). Hansard is the official record of proceedings in the UK Parliament. Though not fully verbatim – transcripts undergo some editing to remove obvious errors and repetition – they form a substantial, near comprehensive account of the spoken words of members in parliamentary debates (House of Commons Information Office, 2010a).

Procedure

We analysed PMQs sessions from the early and latter periods of each of the five PMs. Only question/response (Q/R) exchanges from the permanent LO and the PM were included in the analysis. Therefore, we excluded sessions where questions were taken by the Deputy PM or another stand-in. Similarly, and in the interests of homogeneous sampling, sessions where, for example, the main LO questions were asked by an Acting LO were also excluded.

The number of questions from the LO, whilst apparently fixed at six per session today, was often fewer and irregular in number in the past. We decided initially to analyse the first and last 10 sessions for each PM. On the current format, that equates to 60 Q/R exchanges. However, due to past irregularity, and to maintain consistency, the first and last 60 Q/R exchanges were used for all PMs.

When this research began, David Cameron was the current PM. Therefore, at that time, unlike his predecessors, there was no actual period immediately preceding the end of his tenure. On that basis, the then most recent PMQs sessions (January to March 2015) – the last 10 before the 2015 General Election – were used as an appropriate representation of his latter period. This situation changed when, following the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union (EU) on 23rd June 2016, Cameron announced his decision to resign as PM. Cameron's premiership ended on 13th July 2016 when he was succeeded by Theresa May. Rather than discard the 2015 Cameron premiership data, this forms part of the analysis in our *Original Study*. We then collected data from the period immediately prior to Cameron's departure from office, which we analysed in our *Follow-up Study*. Table 1 shows this in detail.

TABLE 1 NEAR HERE

For the sessions at the beginning of Thatcher's premiership, transcripts were accessed from http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/. Thatcher first became PM on 4 May 1979. The website was checked from that date onwards for occurrences of PMQs: identified via the headings 'Commons Sitting of [date]' / 'ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS' / 'PRIME MINISTER'. Only Q/R exchanges from Callaghan and Thatcher were selected. We continued this process through to the 60th Q/R exchange on 7 February 1980. Transcripts from the subsequent blocks of PMQs (Thatcher's last

through to Cameron's last) were accessible from https://www.parliament.uk/ via the following links: *Parliamentary business* > *Publications & records* > *Commons Hansard archives* > *By date*. Every Tuesday and Thursday, up to the end of Major's premiership (2 May 1997), was then checked for occurrences of PMQs. From that date onwards – the outset of Blair's premiership – the same method was used, though now PMQs had shifted to Wednesdays only. An easier method for PMQs in more recent years was available, also via the Parliament website: *Parliamentary business* > *News* > *Parliament, government and politics* > *Parliament* > *Prime Minister's Questions* – though this applied only to sessions from 26 November 2008 onwards.

Transcripts were analysed for instances of personalisation. In the context of PMQs, personalisations were defined as follows. Firstly, it is worth pointing out that by virtue of the combative nature of parliamentary debate, particularly in an adversarial political system as that in the UK, much of the discourse will be critical, and occasionally of a personal focus. Indeed, the accepted role of opposition politicians is to challenge the actions of the government (Harris, 2001), including ministers and the PM. On that basis, it is necessary to distinguish between exchanges which qualify as personalisation and those that contain personal references which do not.

From the perspective of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), expressing disagreement can be considered a threat to a person's face. Expressions of disagreement based on personal performance may be couched in language which mollifies the effect, making it more polite and showing an element of respect, thereby indicating the disagreement is not personal. Politicians express disagreement, often in relation to personal performance or behaviour, but the choice of language and delivery dictates whether it is classed as disrespect. Only questions or responses

within the LO/PM exchanges adjudged to be personally disrespectful were identified as personalisation – in effect, a personal attack. For example, consider the accusation of broken promises. Prior to elections, politicians state what they will do if they win. Afterwards, for a variety of reasons, they may fail to adhere to their pre-election pledges. Indeed, it is claimed that politicians who are frank about what they are likely to achieve in office, even for reasons outside their control, are unlikely to win an election (Flinders, 2012; Flinders, Weinberg, & Geddes, 2016). These broken promises can lead to accusations of dishonesty. However, unless the comment implies an enduring negative personality trait, or is couched in language deemed personally disrespectful (e.g., "She ratted on that promise, of course…" LO Kinnock to PM Thatcher [Hansard HC Deb, 22 May 1990, col. 167]), it would not be identified as personalisation here.

Another example is a claim that the member opposite is mistaken about a particular issue. Should the comment resemble "The Leader of the Opposition is wrong", this would not qualify; but, a statement like "As usual, the Leader of the Opposition is wrong" implies an enduring negative character trait, therefore would qualify. Furthermore, comments by the LO that the PM failed to answer the question are common in PMQs. Again, however, only those which imply this is typical of the PM, or contain an element of disrespect (e.g., "She dodged the question then, and she is trying to dodge it now" LO Kinnock to PM Thatcher [HC Deb, 28 June 1990, col. 483]) are classed as a personal attack. See Table 2 for further details of comments which qualify as a personal attack.

TABLE 2 NEAR HERE

An additional consideration was the use of quotations. Politicians often cite the words of others in their questions or responses in PMQs. In terms of

personalisation, such rhetoric can be as equally disrespectful and face-threatening; therefore, quotations also qualify providing they fit with the criteria described above. Furthermore, it is important to stress that comments which qualify must have a personal focus, not a group focus. For example, during a session in 2015, Cameron's response to a Miliband question concluded with "What a useless shower" (HC Deb, 28 Jan 2015, col. 852). Though highly disrespectful, and indeed with possible personal implications, this had a clear group focus without any individual personal direction so was not identified as personalisation. Finally, attacks focussing on anyone other than the LO or the PM did not qualify for inclusion.

Analysis was conducted, primarily, using the written transcripts. However, this was supported by video recordings of PMQs sessions sourced from the Parliament website (back to December 2007) and http://www.c-span.org/ (back to October 1989). These were consulted for clarification purposes in the case of examples of personalisation identified as ambiguous from the transcript alone. Video recordings were not available for Thatcher's early period (1979-1980).

All selected transcripts were analysed by the main author. Each turn, both the LO's and the PM's, was coded as either 0 (containing no personal attack) or 1 (containing at least one personal attack). As a measure of reliability, 20% (12 Q/R exchanges) were selected randomly from each of the 10 blocks in the original study to be analysed by a second researcher. Prior to the actual analysis of these sessions, the second researcher underwent a training period in identifying personalisation in PMQs. An interrater reliability test using Cohen's (1960) kappa was performed on the two sets of findings from the 120 Q/R exchanges analysed by both researchers. The resultant figure (k = 0.88, p < .001) indicated *almost perfect agreement* (Landis &

Koch, 1977) in our comparative analysis, supporting the reliability of the main author's identification of personalisation.

Results

These analyses were based on the early and late periods of each PM. We began the research in 2015, whilst Cameron was still the incumbent PM. Consequently, his latter period was represented by the latest at that time: the 10 sessions immediately prior to the 2015 General Election, when he was opposed by LO Miliband. We refer to that as our *original study*. We conducted a *follow-up* study after Cameron resigned in July 2016 – his final 10 sessions prior to resignation now precisely represented his latter period. In the interests of consistency between PMs, we place the greater emphasis on the follow-up (all figures are based on data from that study except where indicated).[iii] However, we do make occasional references to findings from the original study. Statistical analysis was conducted via a generalised linear model (GLM). This was chosen due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable – the level of personalisation by either the PM or the LO. Within each GLM there were two factors: politician (e.g., individual PMs in the first analysis) and period (early and late), and subsequently an interaction effect to assess the difference between periods for each politician.

The first analysis assessed personalisation by the five PMs in their responses to LO questions. Table 3 shows the quantities for each politician by period. Considering a combination of both early and late periods for each PM, Cameron was more personally disrespectful in his responses than his four predecessors. In our original study, he responded with significantly more attacks than each of the other PMs ($p < .001$) – a total of 72 from his overall 120 (60 earliest and 60 latest) assessed

responses, equating to 60%. From our follow-up, where throughout his latter period he faced questions from LO Corbyn, his overall personalised responses were now down to 39.2% – significantly higher than only Blair and Thatcher (p = .012). Total overall personal attacks by Thatcher, Major, Blair, and Brown were 29 (24.2%), 36 (30%), 29 (24.2%), and 45 (37.5%), respectively. Brown's personalisation was also significantly higher than Thatcher and Blair (p = .022). Figure 1 shows overall PM personalisation (early and late periods combined).

TABLE 3 & FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE

The next analysis compared PM personalisation between their early and latter periods. Our original study revealed that, individually, all five PMs increased in their use of personal attacks. To test for significance here, Bonferroni correction was applied due to multiple tests (five early/late period comparisons), which adjusted the significance threshold from .050 to .010. So, whilst each PM's personalisation total was higher in their last 60 responses than in their first 60, the only significant increases were Thatcher's (p < .001), Major's (p < .001), and Brown's (p = .005). Our follow-up, despite still showing a highly significant increase across premierships combined (p < .001), revealed that Cameron was now the only PM to make fewer personal attacks at the end of his premiership – significantly fewer than his early period (p < .001) (see Figure 2). Cameron's reduction in personal attacks when responding to Corbyn in 2016 – down to 20% – stands in stark contrast to his attacks on Miliband the previous year from our original study. In that period, he reached the highest level of PM personalisation in this research – 37 of his 60 responses (61.7%) contained at least one personal attack.

FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE

Figure 3 shows personal attacks directed at the PM in the LO questions. Brown, who across his entire premiership was opposed by LO Cameron, received the most personal attacks. Personalisation directed at Brown was significantly higher than that directed at Thatcher, Major, Blair, and Cameron ($p < .001$). Figure 4 shows that, though there is an increase in combined LO personalisation from early to latter periods, the difference is not significant ($p = .320$). Individually (following Bonferroni correction), only Thatcher received significantly more attacks in the latter period ($p = .003$). Conversely, Cameron received significantly fewer personal attacks at the end of his premiership in 2016 than when he first became PM ($p < .001$).

FIGURE 3 & FIGURE 4 NEAR HERE

In terms of personalisation by individual LOs, again it was Cameron who was the most personally offensive. Figure 5 shows individual performances by LOs and PMs. Focussing on single periods, Cameron in opposition at the end of Brown's premiership used the highest number of personal attacks against any PM. Indeed, there were significantly more LO personalisations in that period than any other (ranging from $p = .019$ to $p < .001$), except for Cameron at the start of PM Brown's tenure and, from our original study, Miliband in PM Cameron's latter period of 2015 ($p = .101$). Conversely, Cameron in opposition at the end of Blair's premiership was one of the least personally offensive LOs: significantly greater than only Callaghan ($p = .047$) and Corbyn ($p = .007$). Corbyn subjected PM Cameron to fewer personal attacks than any opposition leader to their respective PM. His level of personalisation was lower than all other LOs: significantly so in all cases (ranging from $p < .001$ to $p = .007$) except for Kinnock opposing Major, and Callaghan opposing Thatcher.

FIGURE 5 NEAR HERE

Next, we compared each PM to their respective LO (both early and late periods) (also shown in Figure 5). The most noticeable difference was at the start of Brown's premiership, when he received more from LO Cameron than he delivered (p = .015). However, following Bonferroni correction due to multiple comparisons, none of the differences was statistically significant. We then computed the phi coefficient (φ) to assess the association between question and response. This gave us some indication of how the level of personalisation in the LO's question might prompt something similar in the PM's response. Interpretations of effect sizes were based on Cohen (1969). Results indicated that, overall, there was a small effect (φ = 0.28, p < .001). For each period, we found mostly only a small effect or no effect: MT1 φ = .24, p = .067; MT2 φ = .27, p = .039; JM1 φ = -.15, p = .237; JM2 φ = .27, p = .034; TB1 φ = .10, p = .421; TB2 φ = .15, p = .235; GB1 φ = .31, p = .017; GB2 φ = .31, p = .017; DC2(2015) φ = .05, p = .696; DC2(2016) φ = .15, p = .243. There was just one medium effect: PM Cameron's early period when he was opposed by LO Miliband (DC1 φ = 0.41, p = .001).

Discussion

The findings from this research into personalisation in PMQs (from Thatcher's premiership beginning in 1979 to Cameron's ending in 2016) revealed higher levels of personal offence by the more recent PMs. Comparing a combination of the beginning and end periods of their premierships, revealed Cameron used more personal attacks than the other four PMs. From the findings of our *follow-up study* (conducted due to PM Cameron's resignation during this research), his levels were significantly higher than both Thatcher and Blair. Cameron's immediate predecessor Brown was also significantly higher in personalisation than Thatcher and Blair. Our *original study* (conducted whilst Cameron was still PM) revealed the highest level of

personal antagonism by a PM: when responding to questions from LO Miliband in 2015, over 60% of Cameron's replies contained at least one personal attack. The findings support the hypothesis of higher levels of personal disrespect by the most recent leaders, and are consistent with Bates et al. (2014), who reported recent inflated rowdiness in PMQs.

Our analysis indicated a significant increase in personal attacks across premierships when we assessed the five PMs in combination. In terms of personalisation by each PM across their individual periods of office, Thatcher, Major, Blair and Brown increased in their use of attacks on their respective LOs, though Blair's increase was not statistically significant. These findings, including our original study analysis of Cameron in the fifth year of his premiership, support the second hypothesis that, individually, PMs increase in their use of personal attacks. Findings also support Burnham et al. (1995), who, in their assessment of John Major, reported an increase in impoliteness across his tenure as PM. However, the results of our follow-up in relation to Cameron do not support the second hypothesis. Facing questions from Corbyn in his latter period, Cameron was the only PM in this study to make fewer personal attacks at the end of his premiership, in this case a significant reduction on his early period. This anomalous finding is discussed in detail below.

Turning now to personalisation aimed at the PMs, Gordon Brown, who was opposed by LO Cameron across his entire premiership, received the most personal attacks. Evaluating a combination of the beginning and end periods of each premiership, showed the attacks directed at Brown were significantly higher than for each of the other PMs. When comparing early and latter periods, higher levels of personalisation occurred later in the premierships of Thatcher, Major, and Brown, though the only significant increase was for Thatcher. Similarly, our original study

showed PM Cameron was subjected to an increase in personal attacks from LO Miliband, though not statistically significant. In contrast, the follow-up revealed Cameron was subjected to a significant decrease in personalisation at the end of his tenure, receiving the lowest number of personal attacks of any PM in any period.

The personal attacks directed at PMs were examined more closely in terms of personalisation by individual LOs by period. Again, Cameron was the most offensive. His highest level of personalisation directed at the PM was in Brown's latter period, significantly higher than by any other LO in any period except his own opposition in Brown's early period or that which he himself faced from Miliband in 2015. Despite the highest levels of personalisation appearing latterly in our research period, our follow-up revealed a new low in LO personal attacks in 2016: Corbyn, who during his bid for the Labour leadership in 2015 called for a 'new kind of politics' (ITV, 2015), by this measure appears to have delivered on his promise.

Rationale for heightened personalisation

Leaving the relatively polite 2016 exchanges for the moment, let us consider the high levels of personal attacks occurring latterly in this research. The British political system and its particular style of majoritarian democracy – an electoral system that tends, artificially, to create parliamentary majorities rather than power-sharing – lends itself to an antagonistic, confrontational political culture (Lijphart, 2012). Furthermore, this culture is reflected in the layout of the chamber where parliamentary debates are held: opposing benches, where the party of government face the party of opposition (Flinders et al., 2016). The chamber is more befitting confrontation than consensus (Gimson, 2012). But the system and layout have remained relatively unchanged for much longer than the period covered in this research. However, one noticeable change is the advent of television coverage of

parliamentary proceedings, and almost certainly as a consequence, heightened media attention. Bates et al. (2014) propose an increase in adversarial behaviour may be due to the presence of television cameras – broadcasting live to the nation, and across the world in the case of PMQs – and a rise in 'personality politics' dominated by party leaders. The heavy focus on the main players is a view supported by Reid (2014), who suggests PMQs is now considered an LO/PM contest. Reid further suggests that the leaders' performances are commented on and scrutinised, not just in print and broadcast media, but also on social media. Reports often take the form of a sports report. Contributors to the various forms of media discuss the performance of the PM and LO in terms of "goals scored" (Lovenduski, 2012. p. 320). The contest resembles "a form of verbal pugilism" (Bull & Wells, 2012, p. 46), and in the vein of sports reporting, each week a winner is declared (Reid, 2014).

It is under these adversarial circumstances, the media spotlight, and the subsequent mass media post-contest analysis that PMQs is played out each week. Political leaders have claimed their behaviour in PMQs is affected by the circumstances of the event. Following accusations of patronising comments directed at female MPs, Cameron, in a BBC interview, said "[PMQs] is very aggressive, confrontational […] I don't think you can change it actually […] I apologise for that. That's not what I'm like" (The Andrew Marr Show, BBC, 2 October 2011). Former Acting Leader and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party Harriet Harman claimed her reported adversarial performance when facing LO William Hague was due to following the conventions of PMQs, and party expectation (Lovenduski, 2012). Rising to the challenge in PMQs, with the scrutiny and publicity it generates, is viewed by parties across the political divide as a very public assessment of leadership (Reid, 2014).

Expectation and intense public scrutiny are less powerful arguments for increased personalisation across individual premierships. One possibility arises when a PM's latter period comprises the final sessions before a general election. On those occasions, there will be more at stake; leaders will be more inclined to go on the attack, increasing the potential for exchanges higher in hostility. This may explain the higher levels of personal attacks in Major's and Brown's latter periods, and in Cameron's when he faced LO Miliband in 2015 prior to the General Election. However, Thatcher's and Blair's latter periods did not occur immediately prior to an election, and, notably, Thatcher was more personally disrespectful than earlier. Her increase was almost five-fold while responding to a similar level from LO Kinnock.

Levels of personalisation might also be related to leaders' personalities, their individual debating strategies, or interpersonal relationships between opponents. Highly personalised exchanges between political opponents may indeed be reflective of a contempt they hold for each other. Furthermore, a leader's personality or personal style will undoubtedly factor in their conduct at the despatch box. For example, Cameron's "rude" exchanges have attracted much press comment relating to his personal style (e.g., Brown, 2011). However, assessment of these factors was not a focus of this research, but there is an obvious potential for their relevance.

Potential functions of personalisation

Murphy's (2014) observations in relation to personal exchanges included the suggestion that negative personalisations tend to be voiced by the LO because he is frequently compared with the PM. Thus, any damage inflicted on the premier may enhance an LO's reputation. Furthermore, rude questions tend to prompt rude responses, partly because a PM may seem weak if s/he does not respond in kind. Murphy's observations were offered as evidence for the proposal of Culpeper (2011)

that, in interaction, impoliteness is reciprocated. Here, we did not find any large effects of question on response in relation to personal attacks, though the lack thereof is not necessarily indicative of unreciprocated personal antagonism. Indeed, the PM may respond to a question containing personalisation without retaliation, but release a barrage of personal attacks in subsequent responses. Our results (corrected for multiple comparisons) revealed no significant personalisation differences between any PM and their respective LO in 11 periods of 60 Q/R sequences. Arguably, this is further empirical evidence for Culpeper's suggestion that impolite behaviour tends to be reciprocated. However, whether in these exchanges the antagonism was prompted by the LO or the PM remains to be seen.

Waddle and Bull (2016) reported that various forms of personalised response by politicians in interviews are often used as a control measure, typically a form of equivocation. As discussed in the introduction, there are considerable differences between the two modes of political communication. However, equivocation could also be a function of a personal attack in PMQs. Schopenhauer's (1831/1896) nineteenth century essay 'The Art of Controversy' listed 38 stratagems of argument. The final stratagem was "A last trick is to become personal, insulting, rude, as soon as you perceive that your opponent has the upper hand, and that you are going to come off worst" (xxxviii, para 1). A PM might well get personal if in a position of political weakness, or as the least face-damaging response to a difficult question; although personal slurs may also stem from a position of perceived strength.

Ilie (2004) compared Swedish and UK parliaments, and reported insulting language differences. She suggested that insults by Swedish politicians tended to focus on ideological issues, whereas their British counterparts focussed more on personality characteristics. Moreover, British politicians tend to make negative

personal references about the intelligence and wit of their opponents because these personal attributes are encouraged, and a sharp and ready wit is essential in British parliamentary debates. Ilie proposed a further function of this form of personalisation: the rational force of a personal attack is outweighed by its emotional force. In the highly contested environment of PMQs, emotive personal language may indeed be used to disarm or deconstruct political adversaries.

Reid (2014) highlighted examples that correspond to the notion of deconstruction. PM Blair and his Director of Communications Alistair Campbell were aware of the renowned wit and debating skills of LO William Hague and his assured performances at PMQs. With the help of his advisors, Blair's strategy was to attack Hague by claiming that his wit was at the expense of sound political judgement. Campbell (2007) maintained that the strategy of highlighting Hague's skill as a negative characteristic was used to good effect on the LO. Blair (2010), in his memoirs, said that he mastered the art of disarming his political opponents. According to Reid (2014), David Cameron has used PMQs to characterise his opponents as weak. For example, in 2010 he said to Miliband, "The leader of the Labour Party saw a big crowd assembling in the Mall, and he just decided, 'I am their leader, I must follow them.' That is his idea of leadership" (HC Deb, 8 Dec 2010, col. 300). Miliband appeared to employ a strategy in response to Cameron's attacks to characterise the PM as remote and uncaring (e.g., "Is not the truth that he is pulling away the ladder because he does not understand the lives of ordinary people up and down the country" [HC Deb, 8 Dec 2010, col. 301]).

A further consideration for the functionality of personal attacks in PMQs is one leader's motive to highlight their differences from their opponent. In his analysis of language used in a military training facility, Culpeper (1996) suggested that, whilst

one function of politeness is recognition of similarities between interlocutors, impoliteness is a denial of that. Focussing on parliamentary discourse, Ilie (2004) proposed that insults are directed at opposing politicians to magnify their cognitive differences. The party leaders are likely to step up their personal attacks in latter periods as, in some cases, these coincide with the time of an approaching general election. Therefore, they will be motivated to highlight differences to gain support. Mindful of the widespread coverage of PMQs, the leaders' use of such tactics is comparable to 'playing to the crowd'.

Individual differences and differences of opinion

The variation in levels of personalisation by party leaders in this research is not consistent with Murphy's (2014) observation that the constraints of the rules of PMQs limit individual differences in personal expression. For example, the difference between Cameron and Blair was highly significant. Whilst Cameron's more verbally aggressive style went against his pledge to bring an end to 'Punch and Judy politics', and undoubtedly led to criticism from some quarters, other opinion was far from negative. At his final session as PM, Cameron was highly praised for his PMQs performances by former Conservative cabinet minister Peter Lilley: "[…] in 33 years in this House watching five Prime Ministers and several ex-Prime Ministers, I have seen him achieve a mastery of that Dispatch Box[iv] unparalleled in my time […]" (HC Deb, 13 Jul 2016, col. 289). Such a eulogy from a long-standing senior MP supports the claims of Harris (2001) and Bull and Wells (2012) that face-threatening behaviour at PMQs is not only approved but also rewarded. Blair, shown here on the other hand to be the least personally disrespectful, was also acknowledged for his expertise at the Dispatch Box, even by a former LO who opposed him at PMQs (Hague, 2002). He

was also considered a "formidable and experienced performer […] who spent a dozen years seeing off all rivals" (Gimson, 2012, pp. 12-13).

There are also opposing views on the general conduct of members in PMQs. In addition to the criticisms by some concerned for how the public may be turned off by the rudeness on display, including the disquiet of the Speaker himself (Reid, 2014), others are approving. For example, an article parodying Punch and Judy in its title – 'PMQs: That's the way to do it!'[v] (Gimson, 2012) – refers to the event not only as a "test of courage" but also as "one of the few genuinely popular bits of British politics" (p. 11). Personal negativity being far from repellent to political engagement is reflected in a study of American political incivility (Brooks & Geer, 2007), which reports that the electorate may indeed be stimulated by such exchanges.

Cameron vs Corbyn

We conducted our 2016 analysis because of the somewhat unexpected presentation of an actual final period in Cameron's premiership. Corbyn's alternative approach to questioning the PM had attracted not only press attention but also academic (e.g., Bull, Fetzer, & Waddle, 2016). His arrival at the Dispatch Box in PMQs prompted one article to label him 'the saint in the bear pit' (Lees, 2015). Would his approach affect any changes in the recent high levels of personalisation? Our evaluation of Cameron facing questions from LO Corbyn revealed some of the lowest levels of personalisation across the 37-year period of analysis. Corbyn's personal attacks were the lowest of any LO, and Cameron's were curtailed to below one third of that from the previous year when responding to Miliband. This sudden decrease in antagonism raises some interesting questions. In the case of Corbyn, he appears to have followed up on his pledge for politics of a different kind; but why the change in Cameron's approach? This may fit with Culpeper's (2011) proposal of reciprocated impoliteness;

or, more specifically, reciprocated *politeness* towards an LO less inclined to personalise. Another possibility for Cameron's restrained language when facing Corbyn could be his consideration to avoid damaging his own face. Verbal aggression directed at Corbyn – at seventeen years older, and with his new, politer approach to questioning the PM – could be construed by some to be something of an own goal for Cameron. Furthermore, opinion poll ratings for Labour around that time were lower than for any other period of opposition since the advent of modern polling in the 1950s (Hughes, 2016). Thus, Cameron and his advisors may have taken the view that attempting to damage Corbyn in their exchanges at PMQs was not in their party's interests. Indeed, Cameron referred to this view during his final PMQs when quoting from correspondence (seemingly, from a supporter) urging him to respond with "Sensible, sober, polite answers to Mr Corbyn…let him create his own party disunity" (HC Deb, 13 Jul 2016, col. 288).

One noticeable aspect of Corbyn's new approach was to include questions to the PM which were sourced from, and referencing by forename, members of the public, typically sent to the LO by email. In Corbyn's first PMQs session as LO, all six of his questions were of this type. Although Conservative MPs often derided these questions, arguably Cameron might have inhibited his personal attacks when addressing a question from a member of the public. However, Corbyn's use of these questions has gradually decreased, within a few weeks dropping to just one per session (Bull, et al., 2016), and by the time of our analysis period (Cameron's last 10 sessions), they were used only once in occasional sessions. Another possible reason for Cameron's newfound restraint in personalisation relates to the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. Within our analysis period, campaigning was underway for the upcoming referendum. Both Cameron and Corbyn were campaigning for

Britain to remain in the EU. This unusual situation of the leaders of the two main political parties being on the same side in a major issue to be put to the electorate may have factored in the reduced antagonism. Indeed, in the two sessions immediately prior to the referendum in June 2016, neither leader made a personal attack. Between 11 May and 29 June 2016, 18 consecutive LO/PM Q/R exchanges passed without personalisation. This is a sequence unparalleled in these analyses, stretching back to 1979.

Conclusions

This research was conducted to devise a reliable method to identify and measure personalisation in PMQs. From the results, it is apparent that David Cameron's pledge in 2005 to bring an end to Punch and Judy politics was not followed by a sustained decrease in the name-calling behaviour he referred to in his speech at that time. From a relatively low start when in opposition to PM Tony Blair, perhaps indicative of a continued intention to adhere to his pledge, his personalisation grew across his time as LO to a high point in opposition to Gordon Brown in 2010. It then remained high across his premiership up to the General Election of 2015. Until that point, all PMs from Thatcher onwards made more personal attacks on their respective LOs latterly in their premierships than at the beginning. Across the same time frame, other than for Blair's premiership, there was a similar trend for LO personal attacks to be higher in the PMs' latter periods. Significant differences were evident when we analysed Cameron's final period prior to his departure in 2016. His exchanges with Jeremy Corbyn, whilst not devoid of personal attacks, were far more polite, with a threefold reduction in attacks by Cameron compared to those directed at LO Ed Miliband, and the lowest level of any LO by Corbyn.

As to the reasons for the highest levels of personalisation occurring latterly in our research period (1979 to 2016), one possibility is the effects of intensified scrutiny and commentary reminiscent of a gladiatorial contest, which has grown since televising PMQs began in 1989. Broadcasting and reporting on leaders' performances has escalated with the growth of social media. These factors will have increased the likelihood for party leaders to indulge in 'playing to the crowd' behaviour, conscious that personal damage inflicted on their opponent will receive nationwide attention. The different levels of personal attacks may also reflect inter-individual differences between politicians (e.g., personality) or inter-pairing differences on political spectra, neither of which was a focus of our study [for assessment measures see, e.g., Feldman & Valenty (2001), Post (2003), and Lester (1994)]. Our study shows promising results for our coding system of personalisation. Combining our system with measurement approaches for potential causes of personalisation could provide further validation.

Potential functions of personalisation include highlighting cognitive differences between themselves (particularly in the run-up to a general election), attempting to disarm or deconstruct their opponent via a concentrated attack on aspects of their character, and equivocation. The notion that, following a difficult question, a PM may make an equivocal response in the form of a personal attack could be analysed in a future project – using our personalisation coding system in conjunction with an evaluation of the fullness of answers (e.g., Bull, 1994).

Finally, the comparatively low levels of personalisation by both Corbyn and Cameron revealed in our follow-up study raised an interesting question prompting four alternative propositions for the significant decrease in the PM's level of personal disrespect towards the LO. Firstly, as this was the period preceding the EU Referendum, unusually, the opposing leaders were arguing from the same side in a

momentous political issue. Secondly, attacking the older and relatively polite party leader to a high degree may have been potentially face-damaging for the PM. Thirdly, it was considered not politically expedient to inflict damage on Corbyn. Fourthly, in effect, it was merely a form of reciprocated politeness. One further question has emerged from the apparent reduction in personal attacks in 2016, if Corbyn's participation in PMQs has brought about a new kind of politics, how long will it last?

Table 1. The ten blocks of PMQs sessions analysed in each study

PM	Period (Code)	Dates of PMQs sessions
Margaret Thatcher	Early (MT1)	22 May 1979 – 7 Feb 1980
Margaret Thatcher	Late (MT2)	8 May 1990 – 27 Nov 1990
John Major	Early (JM1)	29 Nov 1990 – 23 Apr 1991
John Major	Late (JM2)	3 Dec 1996 – 20 Mar 1997
Tony Blair	Early (TB1)	21 May 1997 – 19 Nov 1997
Tony Blair	Late (TB2)	21 Mar 2007 – 27 Jun 2007
Gordon Brown 2007	Early (GB1)	4 Jul 2007 – 5 Dec
Gordon Brown 2010	Late (GB2)	6 Jan 2010 – 7 Apr

Table 2. Personal attacks in PMQs

Comments focussed on the member opposite which contain or are couched in personal disrespect, e.g.,	**Examples**[vi]
Negative personality statements	*The truth is he is weak and despicable and wants to crawl to power in Alex Salmond's pocket.* (PM Cameron to LO Miliband [HC Deb, 11 Mar 2015, col. 288])
Implications of an enduring negative character trait	*Is not the truth that, just like on every other issue, we get broken promises from this Prime Minister?* (LO Miliband to PM Cameron [HC Deb, 19 Jan 2011, col. 834])
Negative names/labels	*He is just the nowhere man of British politics.* (PM Cameron to LO Miliband [HC Deb, 24 Nov 2010, col. 261])
	He is a socialist – a crypto-communist. (PM Thatcher to LO Kinnock [HC Deb, 18 Oct 1990, col. 1375])
Aspersions/disparaging insinuations	*We can talk about the Prime Minister trebling the deficit, about wrecking the pension system, about ruining the tax system and about bringing this country to its knees.* (LO Cameron to PM Brown [HC Deb, 24 Feb 2010, col. 293])

	He is being funded to the tune of £47 million by the hedge funds. Everyone knows that is why he is refusing to act, but what is his explanation? (LO Miliband to PM Cameron [HC Deb, 4 Feb 2015, col. 265])
Patronising, condescending remarks	*That is a much better question; I think we are making some progress.* (PM Cameron to LO Miliband [HC Deb, 20 Oct 2010, col. 939])
Mockery	*If the Prime Minister is going to have pre-prepared jokes, I think they ought to be a bit better than that one - probably not enough bananas on the menu.* (LO Cameron to PM Brown [HC Deb, 10 Feb 2010, col. 904])
Badgering	*The Prime Minister claims to be a numbers man, so is it 90 percent, is it 95 percent or is it 98 percent? Come on.* (LO Cameron to PM Brown [HC Deb, 25 Jul 2007, col. 836])

Table 3. Number of turns containing a personal attack (pers.) within each period.

PM	Period	LO	LO pers.	PM pers.
Thatcher	Early	Callaghan	8 (13.3)	5 (8.3)
Thatcher	Late	Kinnock	23 (38.3)	24 (40)
Major	Early	Kinnock	9 (15)	7 (11.7)
Major	Late	Blair	19 (31.7)	29 (48.3)
Blair	Early	Major/Hague	21 (35)	11 (18.3)
Blair	Late	Cameron	17 (28.3)	18 (30)
Brown	Early	Cameron	28 (46.7)	15 (25)
Brown	Late	Cameron	37 (61.7)	30 (50)
Cameron	Early	Miliband	24 (40)	35 (58.3)
Cameron	Late [Original study –	Miliband	28	37

	2015]		(46.7)	(61.7)
Cameron	Late [Follow-up – 2016]	Corbyn	5 (8.3)	12 (20)

Note. There are 60 turns per politician per period. Values in parentheses are the percentages of those 60 turns which contained a personal attack. In Blair's early period, Major was LO for only 3 sessions and asked 13 questions, Hague followed as LO and asked the remaining 47 questions.

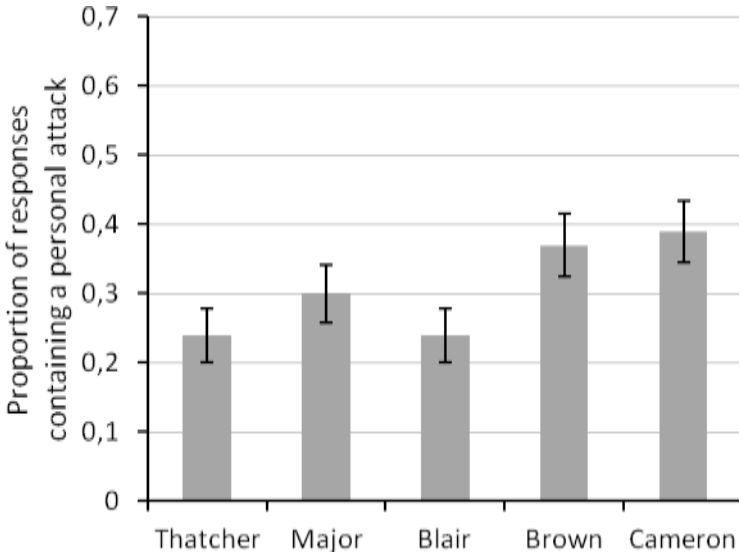

Figure 1. Personal attacks by PMs.
Note: 'Proportion' relates to the estimated marginal means from the GLM. Error bars represent standard error.

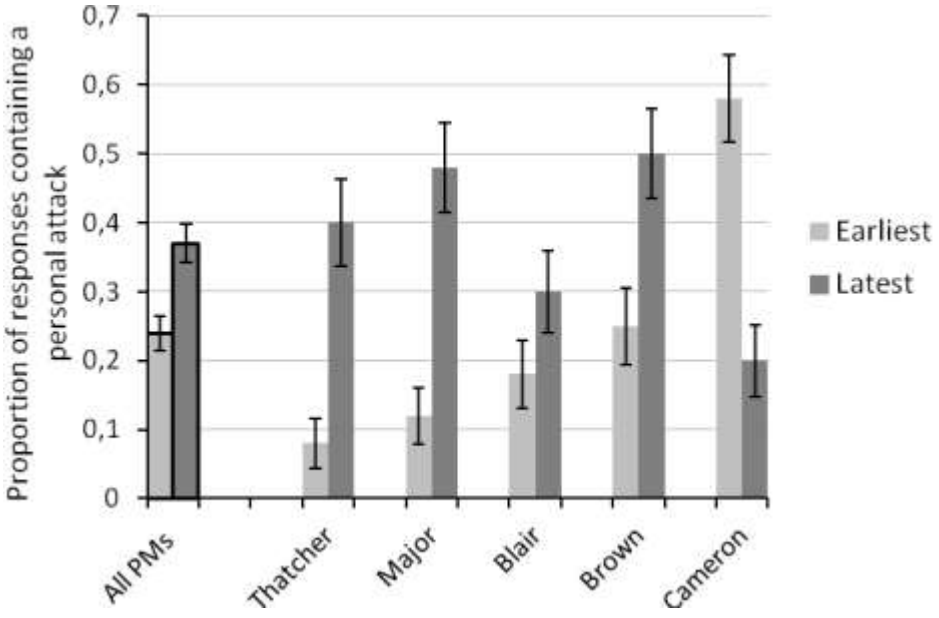

Figure 2. PM personal attacks by period.

Note: 'Proportion' relates to the estimated marginal means from the GLM. Error bars represent standard error.

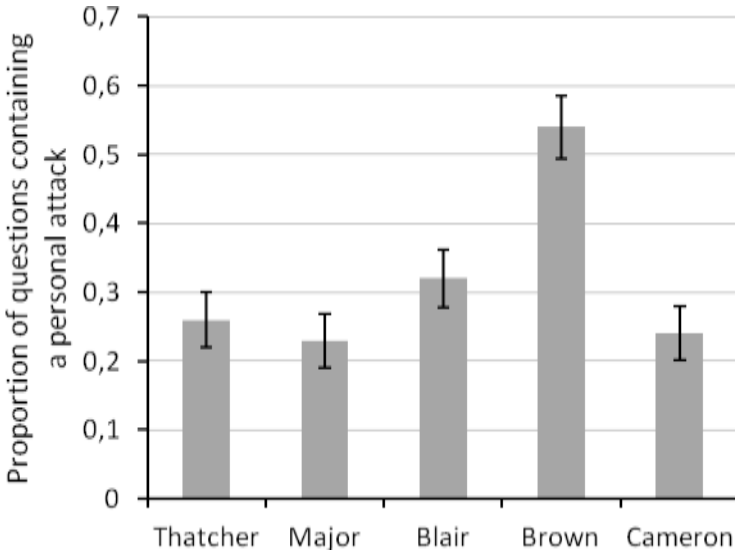

Figure 3. LO personal attacks directed at each PM.
Note: 'Proportion' relates to the estimated marginal means from the GLM. Error bars represent standard error.

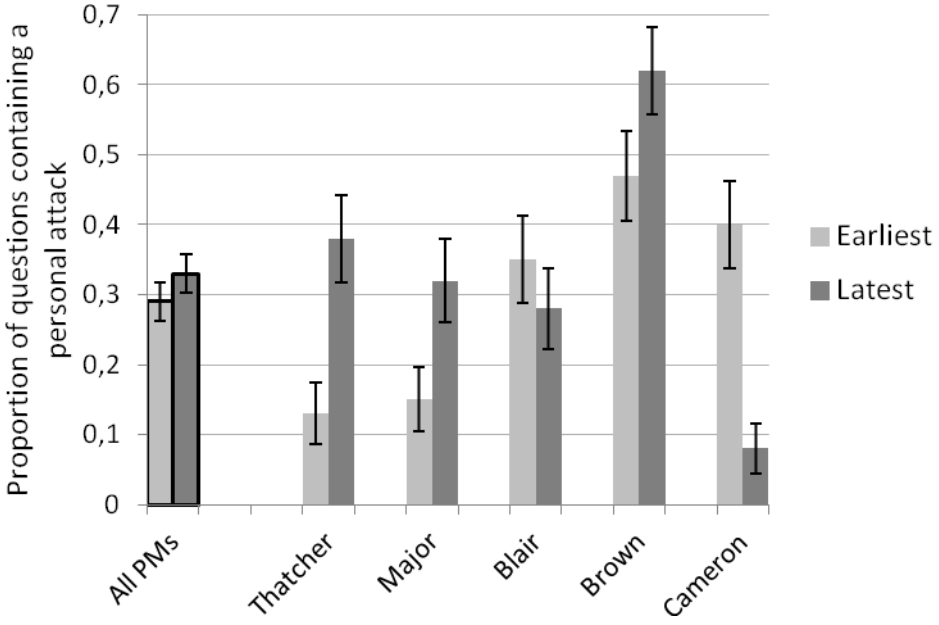

Figure 4. LO personal attacks directed at PMs by period.
Note: 'Proportion' relates to the estimated marginal means from the GLM. Error bars represent standard error.

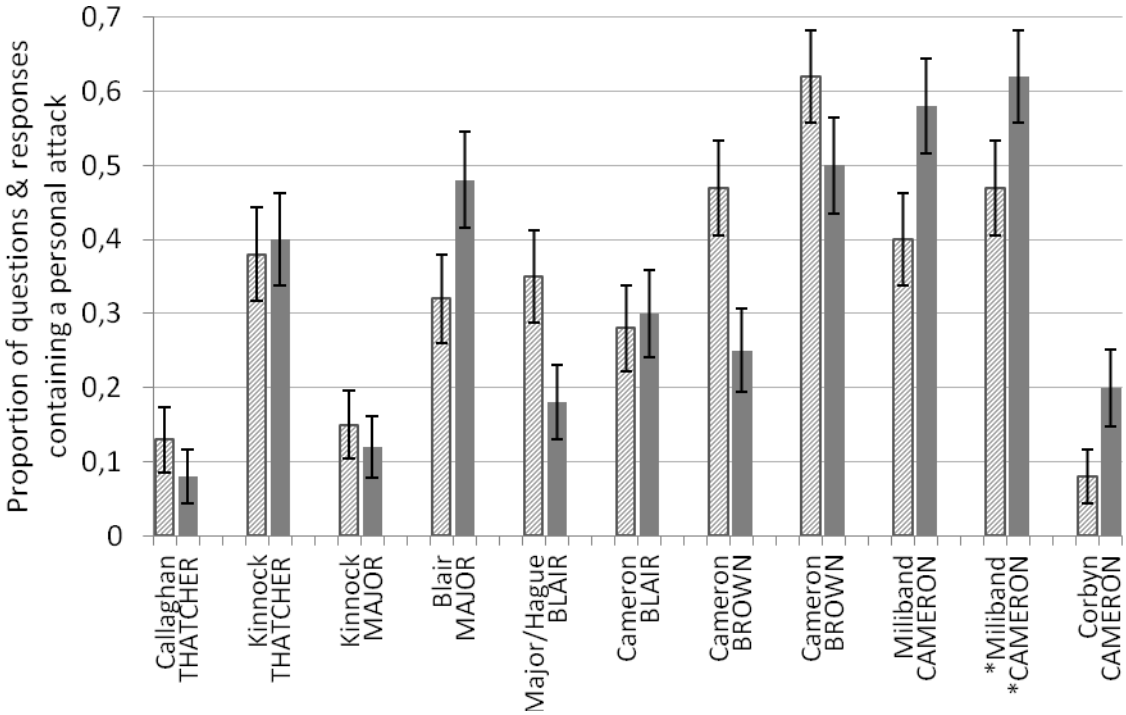

Figure 5. Personal attacks by PMs (in capitals) and their respective LOs.
Note: 'Proportion' relates to the estimated marginal means from the GLM.
* 2015 period from our original study. Error bars represent standard error.

References

Allen, B., Fox, R., Geis-King, I., Gibbons, V., Korris, M., Pavlova, P., & Raftery, M. (2014). *Tuned in or turned off? Public attitudes to Prime Minister's Questions*. London, England: Hansard Society.

Bates, S. R., Kerr, P., Byrne, C., & Stanley, L. (2014). Questions to the Prime Minister: A comparative study of PMQs from Thatcher to Cameron. *Parliamentary Affairs, 67*, 253-280.

Bercow, J. (2010, July 6). Speech to the Centre for Parliamentary Studies. Retrieved from http://www.parliament.uk/business/commons/the-speaker/speeches/speeches/speech-to-the-centre-for-parliamentary-studies/

Blair, T. (2010). *A journey*. London, England: Hutchinson.

BBC. (2011, October 2). Transcript David Cameron interview. *The Andrew Marr Show*. Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/andrew_marr_show/9605621.stm

Brooks, D. J., & Geer, J. G. (2007). Beyond negativity: The effects of incivility on the electorate. *American Journal of Political Science, 51*, 1-16.

Brown, A. M. (2011, June 23). Does 'brusque' and 'rude' David Cameron suffer from Boarding School Syndrome? *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/andrewmcfbrown/100093533/does-brusque-and-rude-david-cameron-suffer-from-boarding-school-syndrome/

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. N. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction* (pp. 56-289). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Bull, P. (1994). On identifying questions, replies, and non-replies in political interviews. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 13*, 115-131.

Bull, P., & Fetzer, A. (2010). Face, facework and political discourse. *International Review of Social Psychology, 23*(2/3), 155-185.

Bull, P., Fetzer, A., & Waddle, M. (2016, April). *"I quote and I am not making this up": The role of quotations in the adversarial discourse of Prime Minister's Questions.* Paper presented at the British Psychological Society Annual Conference, Nottingham, England.

Bull, P., & Wells, P. (2012). Adversarial discourse in Prime Minister's Questions. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 31*, 30-48.

Burnham, J., Jones, G. W., & Elgie, R. (1995). The parliamentary activity of John Major, 1990-94. *British Journal of Political Science, 25*, 551-563.

Cameron, D. W. D. (2005, December 6). Full text of David Cameron's victory speech. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/dec/06/toryleadership2005.conservatives3

Campbell, A. (2007, June 24). Wit, oratory – and evasion. A master debater at work. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jun/24/politics.houseofcommons

Chorley, M. (2013, December 4). 'Buffoons, morons and braying donkeys': What voters REALLY think about MPs' antics at Prime Minister's Questions. *Mailonline*. Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2517966/Buffoons-morons-braying-donkeys-What-voters-REALLY-think-MPs-antics-Prime-Ministers-Questions-revealed.html

Cohen, J. (1960). A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 20,* 37-46.

Cohen, J. (1969). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences.* New York, NY: Academic Press.

Coe, J., & Kelly, R. (2009, October 6). *Prime Minister's Questions* (Standard note SN/PC/05183). House of Commons Library.

Culpeper, J. (1996). Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics, 25*, 349-367.

Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Druckman, J. N., Kifer, M. J., & Parkin, M. (2010). Timeless strategy meets new medium: Going negative on congressional campaign web sites, 2002-2006. *Political Communication, 27,* 88-103.

Feldman, O., & Valenty, L. O. (2001). *Profiling political leaders: Cross-cultural studies of personality and behaviour*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Flinders, M. V. (2012). The demonisation of politicians: Moral panics, folk devils and MPs' expenses. *Contemporary Politics, 18*, 1-17.

Flinders, M., Weinberg, A., & Geddes, M. (2016, April). *The health of democracy recast: The politics of mental health and the mental health of politicians*. Paper presented at the British Psychological Society Annual Conference, Nottingham, England.

Giddings, P., & Irwin, H. (2005). Objects and questions. In P. Giddings (Ed.), *The future of Parliament* (pp. 67-77). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gimson, A. (2012). PMQs: That's the way to do it! *British Journalism Review, 23*, 11-13.

Goffman, E. (1955). On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes, 18*, 213-231. Reprinted in E. Goffman (1967), *Interaction ritual* (pp. 5-45). New York, NY: Doubleday.

Greatbatch, D. (1986). Aspects of topical organization in news interviews: The use of agenda-shifting procedures by interviewees. *Media, Culture and Society, 8*, 441-455.

Hague, W. (2002, April 26). What I learned about Tony – the hard way. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/apr/26/fiveyearsoflabour.labour

Hardman, I. (2015, September 22). Speaker Bercow: Corbyn will need to stick with new PMQs tone for months. *The Spectator*. Retrieved from http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2015/09/speaker-bercow-corbyn-will-need-to-stick-with-new-pmqs-tone-for-months/

Harris, S. (2001). Being politically impolite: Extending politeness theory to adversarial political discourse. *Discourse and Society, 12*, 451-472.

Hoggart, S. (2011, December 14). Prime Minister's Questions – or an unpleasant football match. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/dec/14/prime-ministers-questions-football-match

House of Commons Information Office. (2010a). *The Official Report*. (Factsheet G17, General Series). Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-information-office/g17.pdf

House of Commons Information Office. (2010b). *Parliamentary Questions*. (Factsheet P1, Procedure Series). Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-information-office/p01.pdf

Hughes, L. (2016, September 12). One year into Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, Labour suffers worst opinion poll ratings the party has ever experienced in opposition. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/12/jeremy-corbyns-labour-suffers-worst-opinion-poll-ratings-the-par/

Ilie, C. (2004). Insulting as (un)parliamentary practice in the British and Swedish parliaments: A rhetorical approach. In P. Bayley (Ed.), *Cross-cultural perspectives on parliamentary discourse* (pp. 45-86). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.

ITV. (2015, August 14). Jeremy Corbyn promises 'new kind of politics' as he unveils 10-point policy plan. *ITV report*. Retrieved from http://www.itv.com/news/2015-08-14/jeremy-corbyn-promises-new-kind-of-politics-as-he-unveils-10-point-policy-plan/

Jones, G. W. (1973). The Prime Minister and parliamentary questions. *Parliamentary Affairs, 26,* 260-273.

Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *Biometrics, 33*, 159-174.

Lees, C. (2015). The saint in the bear pit: Reviewing Jeremy Corbyn's first PMQs. *The Conversation*.

Lester, J. C. (1994). The evolution of the political compass (and why libertarianism is not right-wing). *Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems, 17*, 231-241.

Lijphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performance in thirty-six countries.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Lovenduski, J. (2012). Prime Minister's questions as political ritual. *British Politics, 7*, 314-340.

Muddiman, A. (2017). Personal and public levels of political incivility. *International Journal of Communication, 11*, 3182-3202.

Murphy, J. (2014). (Im)politeness during Prime Minister's Questions in the UK Parliament. *Pragmatics and Society*, *5*, 76-104.

Post, J. M. (Ed.). (2003). *The psychological assessment of political leaders: With profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton*. Ann Arbor, MI. University of Michigan Press.

Reid, C. (2014). Rhetoric and parliamentary leadership – Prime Minister's Questions. In J. Atkins, A. Finlayson, J. Martin, & N. Turnbull (Eds.), *Rhetoric in British politics and society* (pp. 45-57). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schopenhauer, A. (1896). The art of controversy (T. B. Saunders, Trans.). Retrieved from https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/schopenhauer/arthur/controversy/complete.html (Original work published 1831).

Sobieraj, S., & Berry, J. M. (2011). From incivility to outrage: Political discourse in blogs, talk radio, and cable news. *Political Communication, 28*, 19-41.

Waddle, M., & Bull, P. (2016). Playing the man, not the ball: Personalisation in political interviews. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 35*, 412-434.

Wolf, M. R., Strachan, J. C., & Shea, D. M. (2012). Incivility and standing firm: A second layer of partisan division. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 45*(3), 428-434.

Notes

[i] 'Punch & Judy' is a puppet show featuring, amongst others, the characters Mr Punch and his wife Judy. Traditionally associated with British seaside resorts, and popular with families, it is often characterised by domestic strife and violence between the puppets.

[ii] Questions deemed difficult to reply to without potential face damage, or based on inaccurate information.

[iii] Figures from the *original study* may be obtained by contacting the first author.

[iv] A box on the central table in the House of Commons chamber from where the PM speaks at PMQs.

[v] 'That's the way to do it!' is a phrase often shouted by Mr Punch (see Note 1) after striking another puppet character.

[vi] A larger version of this table, with additional explanatory examples, may be obtained by contacting the first author.